

Contributions

THE PRAYER MEETING

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Prayer and prayer meeting are terms inseparable. Where two or three are gathered together and a prayer is offered it is a prayer meeting. Where one and God meet and a prayer is offered it constitutes a prayer meeting. Since prayer and prayer meeting are terms inseparable, it would be an injustice to the subject assigned me if I would not offer a few remarks on the subject of prayer. We would inquire then:

I. What is prayer?

Prayer is petitioning. The offering of reverent petitions to an Infinite Being, all wise and all powerful, and is usually accompanied by thanksgiving and confession. It is the communing of a living soul with a living God. It is the key which unlocks the treasures of heaven.

Prayer pre acknowledges two things:

(1) The superiority of God. We turn to the prayers of Jesus, who, within himself was divine, for an illustration. In the touching prayer as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John, he petitions the Father in Heaven to "glorify him with the glory which he had in the beginning." While the relation existing between the Father and Son is such that they are nearly identical with each other, we tread lightly when we speak of his inferiority to the Father. This is shown in the fact that the power of glorification was vested in the Father only,—"Glorify thou me." But this state of subjection to the Father existed only so long as he was here on earth in his mortal body. If the prayers of Jesus show the superiority of God, how much more should ours, coming from fallible creatures.

(2) Prayer also pre acknowledges the all-sufficiency of God. In what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, which should perhaps more properly be called the disciples' prayer since it was given for a model, Christ directs us to pray "Our Father which art in heaven, * * * give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts," etc., clearly shows the all-sufficiency of God. One of the grandest prayer meetings which we have any record of is found recorded in the fourth chapter of The Acts, and so clearly sets forth the all-sufficiency of God. The disciples gathered together and lifted their voices in prayer, "prayed that they might speak his word with boldness, by stretching forth his hand to heal and that signs and wonders might be done thru the name of Jesus." Their prayer was answered and the place where they were standing was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and spake the word with power. We shall in the next place study

II. The need of prayer.

(1) As a means of consecration. Amid all the joys and all the happiness of a Christian's life will come hours of sadness and

gloom. The causes are almost innumerable. Our environments, our day's experience, our observation of life as manifested in its many ways, our associations, these with many others are causes of these depressed hours. If our Savior had not said, "Blessed are those that do hunger and thirst after righteousness," and added the promise, "they shall be filled," I fear not only the weaker would sink in despair but the stronger as well. Am I saying too much when I say that there is no life exempt from its hours of loneliness? When we can speak of little in our Christian life that seems like real life; of a living soul communing with a living God; hours in which we feel oppressed, and a lack of the consciousness of the presence of God; we feel no joy, no peace, no comfort of love, forsaken of all, all as a dead, calm sea; and to add to this unpleasant feeling, to hear of the joy and happiness of others. We read of Payson, that his mind some times almost lost its sense of the eternal world in the glorious thoughts of God. His soul was overwhelmed in the glories of the eternal world; and as Paul, lifted from the earthly scenes and permitted to behold the beauty of the soul redeemed. Edwards tells of the sweet hours he enjoyed on the banks of the Hudson river, while in secret communion with God, and according to his own words, "knows not how to express his experience otherwise than by a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns of the world; and sometimes a kind of vision * * * of being alone in the mountains, or in some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapped and swallowed up in God. But is there no remedy for these depressed hours, no balm for the aching heart, no sunshine to dispel the gloom?

Ah, prayer, prayer, boon of life,
Fountain of joy, end of strife.
If we could half thy power know,
We'd look to thee in every woe.

Worthy of all acceptance is the saying of Plato, "Man know thyself." To know one's self as God knows him is to know his weakness and to know his failures. Personal study and prayer will enable one to judge between right and wrong, good and evil. The soul that visits the sanctuary most will know his Creator best. Wisdom is knowledge put into practice. This same philosopher wisely said, "perfect wisdom has four parts, wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Wisdom, the principle of doing things aright. Justice, the principle of doing things equally in public and in private. Fortitude, the principle of not flying danger, but meeting it. Temperance, the principle of subduing desires and living moderately. We need prayer then as a means of consecration."

When our Savior was yet on earth, and in that night of double darkness, when the flesh was weakening under the tremendous strain, he prayed, "Father if it be possible remove this cup from me, nevertheless not my will

but thine be done." Cups of bitterness will often be removed when our will gives place to God's will. It should be the ruling power in our lives. The prayer, "not my will but thine be done," is the stimulus of all moral activity. A consecration of this kind is the factor in the hands of God for the razing to the ground of Satan's bulwarks, and the erecting of citadels to his glory. We need prayer as a reminder of what we are, of what we claim to be, and of the influence we wield. There is perhaps no feature of worship that appeals so keenly to our conscience as does prayer. Unless he or she has not yet learned what it means to be lost. And especially does it appeal to our conscience when we are conscious of the fact that we are face to face with an Omnipotent and Omniscient Being. Christ has beautifully said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

(2) We need prayer also as a means of spiritual strength. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," is the injunction of Paul. This same power was manifest in the life of Jesus, but it was the power of God working in him. His day's work is done. Some soul is made to rejoice. Some heart is beating with joy. Some eyes are made to see. Some aching wound is healed. But he, the Son of God, some twilight nook has found, and there in the stillness of the night, seeks a refilling of power for the next day's work. Let it ne'er be forgotten that the praying Christian is the strong Christian. He it is that is fortified against danger. When the waves of persecution around him beat, he finds himself protected in the arms of Jesus. We call to mind one in centuries gone by, amid heathen environments, heathen officials, and heathen associates, that refused to eat the king's meat or bow to his image; but offered each day with window open and face set Zionward, his usual prayer. When the hour of prayer arrives, where does it find you? Among the gods of this world, worshiping at the devil's shrine? or does it find you with eyes on the living God and your face set heavenward, from whence you look for the Lord of glory.

It should be borne in mind that the formal prayer yields but little if any strength. "The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." "We have not because we ask amiss." We have not, because our prayers are a mere routine of habit. A brother recently said when asked whether God ever answered a prayer of his, "No; for I never asked for anything." I wonder if he has ever asked for the conversion of souls, for the purging of the world of its many evils, for the opening of the closed eyes, for the unstopping of the deaf ears, yea for the spread of the gospel over the entire globe? Not if his answer is true. In the name of the living God, let the church awake to her duty. Pray the Holy Spirit down, instead of from beneath